

Updating Newtown's Plan of Conservation and Development

PUBLIC PLANNING WORKSHOP March 8, 2003

WORKSHOP TOPIC #3

Preserve More Open Space

Introduction

Newtown is one of Connecticut's faster growing communities. Newtown's popularity as a place to move to is anticipated to continue as long as economic conditions permit. Privately owned open land that may be perceived of by some Newtown residents as open space, is being developed for new residential subdivisions at the average rate of 600 acres per year. It is important for Newtown to act now to identify areas of the Town to be preserved as protected open space in the future and to identify manageable implementation steps.

The following summarizes the Issues, Goals and Strategies that have been discussed for this topic:

OPEN SPACE

ISSUE #1: Enhancement of Existing Open Space Resources

1. There are hundreds of parcels of protected open space located throughout Newtown;
2. The usefulness of open space parcels for the purposes of natural resource protection and passive recreation may be enhanced by adding to those parcels or by developing links to open space located near-by.

Goal: *Enhance the value to the public of existing protected open space.*

Strategies:

1. Prepare a natural resource inventory and management plan for existing municipal open space and for open space obtained in the future;
2. Identify and pursue opportunities to advance natural resource protection and/or improve passive recreational opportunities by adding to existing protected open space lands;
3. Pursue the development of the Pootatuck Greenway, as recommended in Newtown's 1993 Plan of Development as part of a future network of interconnected greenways;

4. Pursue the development of a greenway extending from the upper Paugussett State Forest to Fairfield Hills, as recommended by Newtown's Ad Hoc Open Space Task Force in 2002;
5. Continue efforts to develop criteria and priorities for the future purchase of open space.

ISSUE #2: Passive Recreation

1. Passive recreation is defined to include walking, running, hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, bird watching, wildlife viewing, fishing and picnicking;
2. Most of Newtown's park and recreation resources are concentrated in the Town's central core and have been developed to primarily support active recreational activities and organized sports. This centralized service approach is projected to continue for at least the next ten years;
3. The results of the Community Planning Survey conducted for this POCD update indicate that Newtown residents desire future open space acquisitions to be utilized for passive recreation, such as walking.

Goal: Enhance opportunities for passive recreation.

Strategies:

1. Continue the use of the subdivision open space set-aside process to further the creation of a town-wide, interconnected trail system that is capable of supporting a range of passive recreational activities;
2. Pursue actions which will lead to the linking of protected open space;
3. Eliminate the use of motorized trail bikes, all terrain vehicles and snowmobiles on public lands;

ISSUE #3: Historic Sites and Archaeological Resources

1. Newtown's Community Character is defined in part by the presence of historic structures and archaeological sites that provide links to the Town's past;
2. Some historical and archaeological resources in Newtown have been preserved for continued public enjoyment and education through local and municipal actions, including the establishment of historic districts in the Borough and Hattertown and the creation of the Orchard Hill Nature Center.

Goal: Preserve Newtown's historic sites and archeological resources.

Strategies:

1. An archeological resource inventory should be made part of applications affecting the development of land within Newtown;
2. Newtown's land development regulatory process should utilize archeological inventory information to protect valued historic sites and archaeological resources as protected open space.
3. Explore the use of "village district" regulations and "delay of demolition" ordinances to further

protect Newtown's historic resources.

ISSUE #4: Orderly Development

1. Newtown is one of Connecticut's faster growing communities and growth is anticipated to continue as long as favorable economic conditions permit;
2. Privately owned open land, that may be perceived of by some Newtown residents as open space, is being developed for new residential subdivisions at the average rate of 600 acres per year;
3. It is important for Newtown to act now to identify areas of the Town to be preserved as protected open space in the future and to identify manageable implementation steps;
4. The subdivision approval process can continue to protect open space that furthers the creation of a town-wide system of interconnected open space, while preserving the Town's natural and scenic resources, providing passive recreational opportunities, contributing to the maintenance of the Town's visual character and enhancing the quality of life afforded by these resources.

Goal: *Protecting open space should promote orderly development.*

Strategies:

1. Emphasize the use of the subdivision set-aside process to protect open space as a means of promoting orderly development by: furthering the creation of a town-wide system of interconnected open space, trails and greenways; preserving the Town's natural, scenic, historic and archaeological resources; and providing enhanced opportunities for passive recreation;
2. When possible, utilize open space and conservation subdivisions as an additional means of promoting orderly development and maintaining Newtown's community character by increasing the amount of protected open space resulting from the land development process
3. Develop a more formalized working relationship with the Conservation Commission and the Newtown Forest Association to coordinate efforts and maximize available resources toward the goal of protecting open space in a manner that promotes orderly development;

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

ISSUE #1: Newtown's Pastoral and Rural Landscape

1. The visual character of Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape, including open fields, stonewalls, ponds and streams, country lanes, forested areas, etc., makes a valued contribution to Newtown's Community Character;
2. Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape is altered one lot at a time, as undeveloped land is subdivided and built upon;
3. Some views of Newtown from State highways form lasting images of the Town's natural beauty and contribute to the Town's perceived community character;

4. The points of entry into Newtown from Brookfield, Bethel, Monroe and Southbury, as well as from I-84 interchanges 9, 10 and 11, provide initial impressions of Newtown's Community Character.

Goal: *Maintain the scenic characteristics of Newtown's "Pastoral and Rural Areas," and "Image Corridors" and enhance the "Gateways" to Newtown.*

Strategies:

1. Residential development fronting on town roads within identified "Pastoral or Rural" areas should be sited so as to create a visual buffer from the public realm;
2. Development occurring within identified "Pastoral and Rural Areas" or visible from identified "Image Corridors" should be encouraged to use "conservation" / "open space" subdivision design;
3. Pursue the use of design standards for the maintenance, upgrading and construction of town roads that contribute to the preservation of the pastoral and rural characteristics of Newtown's natural landscape and create a public realm that enhances the character of the areas served;
4. Expand the Town's Scenic Road Program to help preserve the pastoral, rural and scenic characteristics of Newtown's landscape;
5. Consider utilizing the State's Scenic Road Program to help protect the scenic qualities of State highways within identified "Image Corridors;"
6. Upgrade development siting and landscaping at Newtown's "Gateways" to enhance the initial visual impression of the Town;
7. Encourage the elimination of overhead utility lines.

ISSUE #2: Newtown's Borough and Hamlets

1. The Borough is the historic center of Newtown and contributes significantly to the Town's community character;
2. Each of Newtown's four mixed-use hamlets (Botsford, Dodgingtown, Hawleyville and Sandy Hook) contribute in different ways to the character of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Goal: *Preserve the mixed-use functions and enhance the visual appearance of Newtown's Borough and Hamlets.*

Strategies:

1. Support Borough efforts to pursue the utilization of Village District regulations to coordinate development activities that enhance the appearance of the Borough and improve pedestrian mobility;
2. Support community efforts to revitalize and beautify the historic, mixed-use Sandy Hook hamlet, in a pedestrian friendly manner;

3. Continue the implementation of the adopted plan for Hawleyville;
4. Pursue efforts to protect vacant lands surrounding the Borough and Newtown's four hamlets so as to preserve the historic settlement pattern of mixed-use villages and hamlets surrounded by open land;
5. Support actions which will enhance the appearance and mixed-use functions of Newtown's hamlets.
6. Create and adopt design guidelines for future development.

ISSUE #3: The Public Realm

1. The quality of the public realm created by town buildings, parks and monuments, strongly influences the perception of Newtown's community character and the sense of community pride;

Goal: Enhance the public realm's contributions to Newtown's Community Character.

Strategies:

1. When constructing town owned buildings and upgrading existing town facilities, pursue a siting and design strategy that will enhance the public's perception of Newtown's community character;
2. Integrate new municipal facilities into the fabric of the surrounding neighborhood;
3. Consider the co-location of municipal facilities, such as parks associated with schools or other public buildings, to create community activity centers and provide additional opportunities for community interaction.